Message from an Alleged Shrimp Thrower

July 2023

protesting against Stop Cop City. “Oh my god, I *love* the protest folks!” she said. “Do you know [name]?”

And I did know [name], and following the news about [name]’s arrest, their domestic terrorism charges, and their awful treatment within the jail system was a huge part of why I wanted to come show up for the movement. I told this woman as such, and she was so happy. “[Name] did so much for us while they were here. I still call them sometimes!”

All around me, I see people who support the movement. I see them working behind a nurse’s desk, sitting next to me on the bus, and surviving together against the horrific conditions the police force them into. I see these people, and I know in my heart that we’re going to win. The police are picking off supporters one by one because there is no way they can handle the weight of everyone against them.

It’s the police versus the world, and the police know it.

With love and solidarity,
Shrimpy

I began writing this personal reflection the day I was released from jail, while homeward bound on a Greyhound bus. On that trip, my fellow riders and I saw the Appalachian sky yellow and hazy with smoke from wildfires raging more than a thousand miles away. The sight was beautiful, and harrowing.

On the same trip, two different riders complimented my shirt. It was the same shirt I had been arrested in. It proudly declared “NO COP CITY” above an image of trees and foliage growing from a broken, abandoned cop car. One of those encounters happened as we were out and stretching our legs during a stop. I thanked the stranger, paused, and then added, “I was actually just released from jail this morning for protesting.” Her eyes went wide and she launched into a series of excited questions about my experiences. We spent a few minutes discussing the Stop Cop City movement and the repression from the state, before reboarding the bus.

Another rider had overheard our conversation. It turned out he had also been released from jail that day, and he sat near me on the bus, so we talked for a bit our experiences. I was too exhausted to carry on the conversation for long, but it turned out I didn’t need to — everyone sitting adjacent to us had some past history of arrests.

I curled into my seat and dozed for a few hours, listening to my fellow riders as they swapped stories about their arrests, and shared tips for dealing with parole. Outside the windows, the sun dipped beneath the smokey horizon, and the yellow sky turned black.

"We Got Her"

During the sixth Week of Action against Cop City in so-called Atlanta, Georgia, I was arrested for allegedly throwing "uncooked shrimp and spoiled meat" in the direction of police officers at a Stop Cop City protest in Atlanta. According to the arrest ticket, some of this mixture hit a lieutenant in the leg. I was the only person at this protest who was arrested, and although I had been to jail before, the next 48 hours would be the loneliest jail experience I've personally had. In Fulton County Jail, I was crammed into a tiny holding cell with anywhere from 10 to 20 other people. I learned so much from these amazing folks, and was inspired by their endless strength and ingenuity in the face of the horrific jail conditions. Still, the fact that none of my Stop Cop City comrades were beside me gave me the sensation of having a hole in my stomach.

This was, of course, the point. The state knows that our strength lies in our relationships with one another. As I

And even though my cellmates were unfamiliar with the movement, the spirit of solidarity was alive and well in holding cell #148. The ingenuity, tenacity, and spirit of my cellmates reminded me so much of my beautiful comrades on the outside. When any of us had the chance to go to a vending machine, we shared the food and drinks we brought back. My cellmates who had been dealing with the legal system for a long time explained legal terms to folks who were newer. They knew I was a vegetarian, and began saving the meat-free parts of their lunches for me. Someone was taken to the showers, and came back with a bar of soap tucked into their shirt pocket. When the water cart finally came by, we asked for extras, and kept them with the soap next to the sink so we could (sort of) wash our hands. Someone had a book of activities with them, and they tore out pages of word searches to lay on the ground so we would have a cleaner place to rest our heads. Eventually, someone was able to get a pack of menstrual pads from a guard. They opened the pack and stuck the pads to the floor as a makeshift sleeping mat. We slept with our bodies pressed against each other for warmth and comfort.

When I was pulled out of the holding cell to await my court appearance, I was kept in a different cell with different folks – some also awaiting court, and others awaiting their release. I began chatting with one of the women there, and told her I had been arrested while

The guard was not expecting this answer. He became uncomfortable, and fumbled for words. “I mean, you know, people come in here with shirts that show police cars on fire, or other stuff like that, and it gets the other inmates riled up.”

“Well, I happen to live in that neighborhood by the forest. It’s too damn hot there already. I don’t want it to get hotter.” Then, she leaned in close to me, looked me directly in the eyes, and said firmly, “*I* like your shirt.”

This was the only time I cried during my time in jail. And, yes, I got to keep the shirt.

Most of my cellmates had not heard of the Stop Cop City movement, but every single one appreciated it. I wasn’t the best voice for the movement, as a newcomer who was too exhausted to speak most of my time there, but what I could share was well-received. Lorraine, a movement elder and beloved advocate who was among those arrested at a Home Depot the night after my arrest, joined the cell near the end of my time there. Her voice was powerful. When she spoke, people listened, and they respected her and the movement. One of the women there even asked me for ways to plug in. I swore to myself that I would keep a couple zines in my pocket the next time I went to a protest.

sat in the back of the police van shortly after my arrest, I heard a cop say into their radio: “Did we get the right white female in a plaid shirt?” A response crackled back: “Yeah, we got her.” Another protester matching my description was detained, particularly violently, slammed into the ground with her hands zip tied behind her back. Thankfully, she was released shortly afterwards.

I heard instructions coming through the radio, saying something along the lines of: “We’ve detained one. Now let’s pull back and monitor.”

It was clear that the protest wouldn’t have ended without *someone* getting arrested. At first, I wondered, “Why me?” But soon, that question shifted: “Why *just* me?” The state could have arrested both of us and given each of us a bullshit charge. Hell, they could have arrested everyone present that day. They arrested two protesters the next day for holding a banner in a Home Depot parking lot. Comrades have been held in jail for weeks just for posting fliers. And just a few months ago, dozens of folks were charged with domestic terrorism for *attending a music festival in the woods*. Clearly, the cops don’t need the appearance of validity to slap someone with charges. Given that, I was baffled as to why they would content themselves to one sacrificial protester when they already had another detained in the back seat, and certainly had the resources to arrest more.

By the time I left Fulton County Jail forty-eight hours later, I felt like I had the start of an answer.

“Just a Holding Cell”

The booking process at Fulton County Jail that day was far from straightforward. After a medical screening, I was sent to holding cell #148. Out of about a dozen-odd holding cells, #148 was reserved for female-presenting inmates. Every new female-presenting person dropped off by the cops was thrown in #148, regardless of how many people were already there. On average, there were about 18 people in the cell, peaking at 22 souls. By length and width, the cell was just larger than a Ford F-150. One of my cellmates commented: “There’s just a few too many *energies* in here right now.”

The cell included a toilet and a sink, but the water was broken, and no soap was provided to us. During the first few hours, the guards were willing to let us out to use hand sanitizer if we asked for it, but when the night shift came in, that stopped. The night shift guards were strict about not even cracking open the women’s cell door when the male inmates were out, but they were also too overwhelmed, understaffed, and neglectful to compensate by proactively bringing us hand sanitizer. No one could wash their hands for hours upon hours.

But after my brief time at Fulton County, I’ve been recontextualizing some things. When I was moving with the other protestors and turned around to see a horde of a dozen APD cops rushing towards us with zip ties, it felt like we were being hunted by some massive, unstoppable beast.

But in the context of what I saw in Fulton County Jail, the actions of the Atlanta Police Department feel, to me, more like the actions of a desperate agency who knows that even with every resource in the world at their disposal, they are vastly outnumbered. I may have been handcuffed, but their hands were tied. Their need to resort to picking off protesters one-by-one may feel intimidating and unpredictable to us in the moment, but I think it’s a defensive tactic of an agency fighting a losing battle. Fulton County jail is too full to take a single protestor, and our movement is massive.

During my medical screening, a guard supervised me while a nurse checked my vitals and asked about my medical history. The guard told me that after the nurse was done, I would be given a cup to pee in, and while in the bathroom, I was to turn my NO COP CITY shirt inside out, or they would give me something to cover it up.

Without missing a beat, the nurse said, “Why? I like the shirt.”

Solidarity Forever, Solidarity Everywhere

I came to Atlanta for the sixth Week of Action after having never attended one previously. In fact, I hadn't stepped a foot outside of my home state in years. The movement to defend the forest and Stop Cop City has been inspiring in its adaptability and fortitude. In other words, it felt like something I couldn't possibly contribute to. But when the police repression exploded last December, Tortuguita was brutally murdered, and our comrades were held in jail for months, it felt necessary to show up. In my mind, police repression is a tool of fear, and can only be fought by demonstrating that they don't fucking scare us.

Of course, they do fucking scare us. Before I left home, I made a list of people I wanted to be contacted if I was denied bond and ended up in jail for weeks or months – people I thought might want to write me a letter and who would feel outraged if they knew what happened. Up until I was (shockingly, to me) granted bond, I seriously reckoned with what it would mean to be in jail for that long. I would lose my job. I would lose my home. I would probably never again see my beloved cats. I knew this was a risk when I came down south. The reality didn't set in until I was shivering on a metal bench next to a woman who hadn't seen her children for forty days.

They also denied us water. For the most part, every few hours, either a guard or inmate worker would come by with a cart with water cups, as there was no running water in the cell to drink from. But sometimes, they would forget. We banged on the cell doors and begged for water, and time and time again were told the same thing: *"Just a few minutes."*

After a few hours of this, we began to shout back: *"We know you're lying! Give us water!"* One of us had a pen and paper, and we wrote a note to stick on the glass. Another had a watch, so we knew exactly when the last time we had water was, and could shout: "*It's been three hours since we've had water. … It's been four hours. … It's been five."* The longest we went was six hours, but I have no doubts other inmates at Fulton County Jail have been denied drinking water for much longer.

The cell was cold and the floor was hard tile. Inmates were kept in the clothes they arrived in, unless those clothes were considered "inappropriate". We begged for sweatshirts, or even extras of the standard jail shirts, and were consistently denied. We were also denied sleeping mats and covers, because technically the cell we were in was "just a holding cell." It wasn't part of the main jail, and was supposed to be a temporary stop before inmates were transferred somewhere more permanent. I was in

that cell for 40 hours. I've heard of other folks there for five days and even longer.

Eventually, one of the guards came to our cell to explain that the reason this section of the jail needed to be kept so cold was because, as a holding area, people were coming in fresh off the streets, without a medical screening, before being showered and changed, and with all of their germ-ridden belongings. Keeping the area so cold was important for preventing the growth of bacteria. Again, we asked to have soap or hand sanitizer in the cell. Again, we were told no.

The jail was chaotic and disorganized. My booking process took more than seven hours. Inmates were placed in a cell, and called out every few hours to whatever part of the process was next available, whether it was getting their photo taken, being fingerprinted, getting showered and changed, or being "officially" booked in. I was lucky that some comrades on the outside knew my personal details and communicated with jail support, because we were told we weren't allowed any phone calls until the booking process was complete. Some of my cellmates were terrified because their kids were home alone and none of their loved ones knew where they were. Every time our cell door was open, we demanded they be allowed to make a phone call. *"Not until they're booked in."* Well, when can they get booked in? "*We have to go one at a time."*

At one point, I heard a jail staff member venting about how they had 99 men and 20 women at the time — just in the holding area. That number was undoubtedly higher by the time I left. Some folks were in another area of the jail, where they were given sleeping mats and covers while awaiting transfer to Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC). But ACDC was full, and until some folks were released from there, the folks in the other section of Fulton County Jail couldn't leave, so we couldn't be moved to the other area, and we remained stuck in the holding cell, which felt tinier with each new person the cops brought in.

We argued with the guards about these conditions, and the guards said they couldn't help it. They said they had to accept whoever the police brought — and in Atlanta, police *love* to arrest people. "One of the guys here was brought it for a *windshield wiper violation*," a guard told us. "It don't make sense. I can't make it make sense." The police just drop people off and leave. They don't have to deal with the fallout.